

Oil Spill Preparedness in Lummi Waters

from the Water Resources Division

For the last decade, staff from the Lummi Natural Resources Department (LNR) and the Lummi Nation Police Department (LNPD) have trained for an oil spill from one of the refineries north of the Reservation. Such a spill could result in thousands of barrels of oil spilling into the Strait of Georgia and Puget Sound threatening Lummi waters and the shoreline. On July 30, 2010, the Lummi Oil Spill Response Team's seventh oil spill boom deployment drill took place on the shores of Portage Island. Together with LNPD staff, LNR staff practiced deploying a 1000-foot long boom from the shore. The Lummi Oil Spill Response Team has also participated in one or more "table-top" drills each year with one of the refineries and have participated in several occupational safety classes.

Oil Spill Response

The Lummi Natural Resources Department has booms and absorbent materials at the ready that can be used to keep oil away from the shores and remove oil from the water and beaches. This spill response preparedness is part of a bigger, regional organization where federal, state, county and corporate agencies work with tribal agencies to coordinate the response to a possible oil spill. Here on the Reservation, booms would protect the tide gates of the Seapond and deflect the oil away from beaches, or they would corral the oil, so it can be vacuumed up by skimmer trucks and boats.

The Portage Island Drill



On July 30, the Lummi Oil Spill Response Team practiced two of the strategies identified in the regional Geographic Response Plan (GRP) on Portage Island. The goals of the drill were to gain experience deploying the containment/deflection boom from the Spill Response Trailer on Portage Point, to practice the GRP strategy for Portage Island, and practice open water containment. The boats tow the boom to the island while staying out of the advancing oil that would move down Hale Passage in a real event. Frank Lawrence III, Jamie Matson, Victor 'Turtle' Johnson, and Jean Snyder from the Water Resources Division are an experienced boat crew who ably handle the unwieldy boom using the specially equipped boat named the "Responder". The shore crew tied the boom off to heavy drift wood logs to anchor it against the currents. The police crew then practiced the boom deployment with hands-on involvement by Ralph Jefferson, Chief of Police,

Sgt. Ed Conway, and new officers from the Natural Resource Police Division, Jay Martin and Richard Hart. After a debriefing on the beach, the two boat crews each captured one end of a 500-foot boom and towed it in an U-shape. This open-water containment maneuver was used frequently in the Gulf of Mexico to collect oil from the Deep Water Horizon spill. A skimmer ship can then pump up the oil collected between the two boats.

On shore, the two boat crews were supported by staff from the Lummi shellfish and salmon hatcheries. Linda Delgado, Lizzie Oberlander, Ryan Vasak, Bill Revey Sr., Ernest 'Scrap' Jefferson, Carl Lawrence, and Michael Wright acted as shore crew and helped load and unload the spill response trailer. Leroy Deardorff, the Environmental Director of LNR, and Jeremy Freimund, Water Resources Manager, were the leads that coordinated the drill and supported the shore crew. Fish commissioners Richard S. Solomon and Robin Wilson supported the LNR boat crew on the "Responder".

All maneuvers were observed by two staff from the Marine Spill Response Corporation (MSRC) who offered advice. The MSRC is a professional oil spill response company that works for clients like BP and ConocoPhillips and would be very actively involved in a real spill. The Lummi Team would work with boats from MSRC and the U.S. Coast Guard in a worst case event.

Spills on the Reservation

Not all oil spills are big and catastrophic and the Lummi Oil Spill Response Team has 'mopped up' smaller spills on land and in the water in recent years. There were accidental spills at the gas station, oil discharging from the bilge of boats, a sunken boat still tied up to dock, and kicked-over and abandoned hydraulic oil canisters, among other incidents. In the event of these smaller spills, usually the LNPd reports to the scene first and LNR staff helps to contain and clean-up the spill with absorbent materials.

Your Response

As little as a quart of spilled oil, diesel, or gasoline can contaminate acres of water and can prove deadly to all forms of marine life. Juvenile fish, shellfish larvae and other fragile marine life that is essential for the Lummi fisheries and the environment are extremely sensitive to even small amounts of oil or other petroleum products. A rainbow sheen on the water is a sign of trouble.

If you see an oil spill – small or big – call all of the following numbers:

Lummi Nation Police Department

360 384 2266

911 for emergencies

Lummi Natural Resources Department

360 410 1706

National Response Center (Homeland Security and U.S. Coast Guard)

1 800 424 8802